DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 161 PS 019 925

AUTHOR Strain, Phillip S.; Smith, Barbara J.
TITLE Global Educational and Social Forces Affecting Preschool Mainstreaming. Policy and Practice in Early Childhood Special Education Series.
INSTITUTION Allegheny-Singer Research Inst., Pittsburgh, PA.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Apr 91
CONTRACT H-024-K-90002
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Economic Factors; Educational Administration; Educational Change; *Educational Policy; *Educational Practices; *Mainstreaming; Parent Role; *Preschool Education; *Research Needs; *Social Influences; Special Education; Unions
IDENTIFIERS Site Based Management

ABSTRACT

Focusing on special education and early childhood policy and practices, this paper highlights global educational and social forces that demand professional attention and study. These global forces include: (1) the movement toward educational reform and an improved competitive edge in the world marketplace; (2) the unionization of educational professionals and protectionism; (3) the trend toward site-based management; (4) the expanded role of parents in schooling; and (5) the unprecedented number of states and locales with severe fiscal difficulties. Following discussion of each of these forces, corrective ideas are offered related to the experimental analysis of integration ecologies, the synchronization of rhetoric and practice, and the prioritization of children with special needs in the context of integration. It is concluded that widespread integration of special needs children into regular classrooms will likely be impossible without a new, coordinated, and massive effort to understand and alter many fundamental features of present educational practice and policy. It would be rash to assume that integration efforts will grow to their full potential without regard to issues of finance, unionization, site-based school management, educational reform, and parental concerns. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ALLEGHENY-SINGER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

320 East North Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15212-9986
412-359-1600

Early Childhood Intervention Program

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED335161

POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES[1]

GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL FORCES AFFECTING PRESCHOOL MAINSTREAMING

Phillip S. Strain, Ph.D.

and

Barbara J. Smith, Ph.D.

April, 1991

PS 019925

[1] One in a series of papers developed by the Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming to assist policy makers in developing preschool mainstreaming policies. The Research Institute on Preschool Mainstreaming is funded under cooperative agreement #H024K90002 from the U.S. Department of Education to the Allegheny-Singer Research Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Education nor the Allegheny-Singer Research Institute and no official endorsement should be inferred.

VHA
Member of Voluntary Hospitals of America, Inc.

GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL FORCES AFFECTING PRESCHOOL MAINSTREAMING[2]

As a field, education is making good, sometimes spectacular progress on many of the mechanics of integrating children with disabilities into regular educational settings. For example, quite a bit is known about instructional and social integration, about personnel needs and competencies, about the formation and purposeful development of positive attitudes toward integration, and about family roles in the process. By comparison, far less seems to be known about the broad educational and social contexts in which integration is offered.

It is the purpose of this paper to highlight some of the global educational and social contexts that should demand our professional attention and study. These global forces include: a) the movement toward educational reform and an improved competitive edge in the world market place; b) the unionization of educational professionals and protectionism; c) the trend toward site-based management; d) the expanded role of parents in schooling; and e) the unprecedented number of states and locales with severe fiscal difficulties.

Global Educational and Social Influences on Preschool Mainstreaming

Educational Reform and the Need to Compete in World Markets. The political and schooling climate in this country has seen and heard a ground swell of complaint over the last decade. That we, as Americans, are growing illiterate, unskilled, and

[2] Substantial portions of this paper are contained in Strain, P.S., & Smith, B.J. (in press). Global educational and policy forces affecting preschool integration. In C. Peck, S.L. Odom, & D. Bricker (Eds.), Integrating young children with disabilities into community programs. Baltimore: Brookes.

non-competitive with other industrialized countries is a sentiment voiced by business and industry, parents, civic leaders, some school officials, and belatedly, by politicians. The response to this criticism has been broad, ranging from the trivial (e.g., assertions about being an "Educational President") to the profound (e.g., changes in curricula, parent choice options for schooling, outcome-driven school districts).

In a most fundamental way, many current efforts at educational reform are philosophically and operationally intolerant of integration at all levels of schooling. At the philosophical level, the negative dimension of the reform movement is best understood by the words of those actually doing the implementation:

> ***Urban District Teacher: "These kids have to learn the material; they have to learn it in the set order; they have to all make the grade."***
>
> ***Urban District Superintendent: "We are accountable now. I know all my teachers are on the same material on the same day."***
>
> ***Urban District Parent: "We drill at home. We have to. If he gets behind there is no chance to catch-up."***

Together, these "local" comments reflect a national trend toward a philosophy of regular or typical education characterized by rigidity in method and a blatant denial of individual differences. Consider the following remarks also:

> ***Rural District Teacher: "We've cut all our extracurricular services. All the money is going to math and science."***
>
> ***Rural District Superintendent: "We can't have clowns in class and good achievement too. We use in-school suspension, and now the teachers can teach."***

Rural District Parent: "My older kids have dropped out, they went to school for sports, I guess. They're a big help on the farm."

The above comments reflect another constellation of values and philosophy that may be summarized as follows: a) we'll achieve good academic outcomes at almost any price; and b) if we need to track (on a de facto basis), we'll do that too. Obviously, those motives fly in the face of an inclusive philosophy of education.

Many national efforts to "toughen-up" curricula, teachers, and schooling also bring into question whether a typical class can be considered as educationally or socially viable for children with disabilities. Is it a good outcome to be integrated in a "reformed" class where competition is valued, where lock-step instruction is acknowledged and valued, and where human variance is seen as weakness in an economic struggle with Japan and Germany? Asking the question may be just as relevant as the answer. These comments by no means suggest that reform is not necessary. Yet, when reform takes the path toward (a) a narrow outcome focus, (b) "antiseptic bouncing" of students who may negatively influence overall tests scores, and (c) one curricular sequence for all, then the well-being of children with and without special needs must be questioned.

Unionization of Educational Professionals and Protectionism of Same. On balance, it can certainly be argued that unionization in the teaching profession has been a force for positive change (Johnson, 1984). As regards integration, however, the balance sheet seems tipped in the opposite direction. It must be said that this negative influence is best seen as an unintended consequence. What are the ways

in which unionization and its protection of constituent interests affect integration practices? Again, consider the words of those most intimately involved:

> ***Special Education Supervisor: "We have some serious problems with this plan to train our staff to consult with preschool and kindergarten teachers. The union prohibits any outside-the-school-day time requirement and the new contract also prohibits the observation of tenured teachers for evaluation purposes. They will see this as evaluation."***
>
> ***Building Principal: "We don't do mainstreaming in this school because the union representative is against it."***
>
> ***Regular Class Teacher: "The contract says I only have to have three special eds. in my class."***

These statements reflect a number of very troubling issues viz a viz integration, or any other innovation for that matter. For example, union contracts may present barriers to the very kind of intensive, job-embedded, competency-based inservice training that is necessary to achieve significant change in practice (Guskey, 1986). Also, with their threat of grievance filing at hand, union members and representatives may short circuit any change in schooling that they do not support. Even more directly in opposition to integration, union contracts have specifically limited the accessibility of children with disabilities to the educational mainstream. Parenthetically, quota systems, like that alluded to in the prior teacher comment insures other than community-based schooling, expensive transportation costs associated with same, and an undeniable image of children with disabilities as detrimental to typical school settings.

At the other extreme, union activity may be highly supportive of integration. Consider the remarks from an adjacent school district:

> ***Union Representative: "We try our best to accommodate everyone's needs in our negotiations. It is very important for us to be in-step with new trends and concerns. If we are too far out in front or lag behind, everyone loses. Mainstreaming is a good example. We have really worked to get our teachers the training they need initially and the support they will continue to require."***
>
> ***Superintendent: "Our aim is to work cooperatively on the issues we value as a community. Our relationship with the union is primarily a hand-in-hand proposition. Together, we have built the necessary structures to increase professional development, mainstreaming, and curricular adaptations for students who are not best served by our standard practices. In a district as diverse as ours, we have to be diverse ourselves."***

Obviously, unionization in and of itself has no direct positive or negative influence on integration options. However, it is probably always the case that unionization will make the process more complex by bringing another powerful voice to the debate.

Site-Based Management. One of the more often voiced elements of reforming schools is the notion of site-based management (Elmore, 1991). The notion and the motivation behind site-based management are quite simple. Top-down management and regulations are seen as inhibiting good educational practice. As power and decision-making is shifted closer and closer to a building level, superior educational practices will emerge. There can be no doubt that many school systems are plagued and stagnated by endless bureaucracy and dysfunctional regulatory practices. The question of import related to integrating children with disabilities is whether federal and state special education procedural guidelines such as placement in the "least

restrictive environment" (LRE) for example, are seen as part and parcel of the regulatory baggage that site-based management may try to discard. On the other hand, site-based management may offer an avenue to expanded integration options. Consider the following statements from very different site-based managed schools:

> ***School One Principal: "We've dealt with our conduct problems where the district could not. Our parents and our teachers know what we need for learning. We've removed the bad apples."***
>
> ***School Two Principal: "We value all the kids in this school, like we value all the staff. Everyone can make a contribution when they have the chance to be included. We've decided that integration is what we want as a school and it is working."***
>
> ***School One Teacher: "My friends at Lincoln school are very envious; they can't control what comes in their class and they can't remove those kids who won't learn."***
>
> ***School Two Teacher: "We were all very nervous about the site-based system, but we've really been given the choices we needed. We're most proud of our integration program; it's totally different from the other district schools."***

The comments from these two site-based managed schools suggest the range of outcome that this school reform innovation has for integration. In school one, site-based management is synonymous with a pre-P.L. 94-142 or federal and state approach to due process and continuum of service delivery. In school two, site-based management has led to integration options that far exceed any regulatory mandates. If, indeed, site-based management becomes a prevailing trend, then we must be prepared to closely monitor the variance in integration practices that will surely follow. Site-based management also suggests the need to expand efforts at influencing and

educating personnel at the building level regarding effective practices in preschool mainstreaming.

Expanded Role of Parents in Schooling. Early intervention is by no means the only educational arena in which parents are being provided with far greater access to schools and decision-making. The expanded role of parents in the regular educational establishment ranges from the controversial choice of school and tax credit options to home/school collaborative teaching projects, to parental majorities on individual school building voting bodies (Kearns & Doyle, 1988). Like site-based management, the increased role and power of parents may be seen as a double-edged sword viz a viz integration. The comments below represent the range of outcome we might expect:

> ***Parent on Majority Voice Board: "These handicapped kids are wasting our resources; our money, our teachers' time, and our kids'. We need retarded classes just like we need advanced English classes."***
>
> ***Parent on Majority Voice Board: "The teachers don't want these kids. If they don't want them then what good will it do to put them in these classes. What do we have special education for anyway?"***
>
> ***Parent on Majority Voice Board: "Who wants to be isolated, not me, not my kids. Don't these parents pay taxes too. I say integration is the only fair thing to do. And I know the rest of you would want it for yourself."***

Not only will an expanded role for parents in educational decision-making likely increase the range and number of voices speaking and deciding about integration at a local policy level but parents' increased decision-making at the early childhood level should have the same effect. Herein lies a troublesome dilemma and potential conflict. That is, suppose one strongly advocates for the following:

1) Parents should have maximum choice and decision-making power in the early intervention program.

2) Full-time integration is best for all children.

Now suppose that a family chooses other than an integrated option. Is the professional to relent, argue, have previously weighted these values so no dilemma exists? The trouble seems to come about most often when the values specific to parental empowerment and integration have been stated in absolute terms. One should not underestimate the psychological costs to parents that extremely stated values may come to demand. Consider these comments from parents whose children are now functioning within normal developmental limits after early intervention (an integrated early intervention program at that):

> ***Parent One: "Where can _____ get the attention I want him to have except in a special class. He can test right for placement with some luck. I've been to see the kindergarten where he would go, it's awful."***
>
> ***Parent Two: "I feel embarrassed because I know what being around normal kids has done for _____. But this class is small, look at all the teachers you have. My Catholic school is an option, but it's so expensive."***
>
> ***Parent Three: "My husband and I go back and forth. We think he needs extra attention. He needs his peers too. We've been thinking about starting our own school, I don't know what else would work."***

Unprecedented Fiscal Problems. The last decade has witnessed a growing fiscal calamity for public education. Tax payer revolts, mandatory lay-offs, and zero growth budgets are the rule rather than the exception across the country. At this writing, a recessionary trend is exacerbating these financial woes. It is within this

shrinking market that all innovations, integration included, must compete for educational attention and dollars. How will integration efforts fare in this climate? On the surface, the fiscal equation is not favorable. The following comments summarize the negative valences:

> ***School Board Member: "With special education we have the few taking the greatest proportion of resources. The least we can do is see that capable kids are not held back by mainstreaming."***
>
> ***Superintendent: "We're asked to pick-up more and more of the burden for special education. Our regular program is obviously hurt by this. Parents are just not going to stand for this, and they sure don't want anything to do with mainstreaming."***
>
> ***Preschool Supervisor: "It is really unrealistic for us to look at any kind of significant change in our system. We cannot afford inservice, reduced class size, or new materials. My staff is depressed, they hardly want to hear any new ideas."***

These comments are reflective of a "circle the wagons" mentality that seems to prevail in any large bureaucracy when difficult times are at hand. Such a preserve-the-status-quo sentiment is most understandable and it is arguably prudent as well. What is dysfunctional and damaging to integration options is the parallel tendency to "shoot" inward once the wagons are circled. Notice that the comments above lay blame, directly or indirectly, at the feet of special education and eligible children. Not only is the blame mean spirited, but it is economically wrong and politically naive. As the billion dollar per day Desert Storm operation showed, resources are not scarce, the root problem is a lack of priority for education in general, and children with special needs in particular.

Some Corrective Ideas

If we look at the full picture of educational reform, fiscal uncertainty, site-based management, increased parent involvement, and related forces, the integration of young children with disabilities takes on a necessarily complex and troublesome character. Yet, this complexity affords the opportunity for something other than the on-set of depression. It affords the opportunity to alter all of the many variables that play a part in the life history of integration. The following ideas are offered for critical reflection and action.

Experimental Analysis of Integration Ecologies. If we as a field are serious about widespread, nationwide integration, then we must apply our scientific energy and dollars to understanding integration from other than a technocratic perspective. We must also understand the sociology of integration, the politics of integration, the economics of integration, as alluded to in this paper. Some initial work of this kind has been done by Peck and his colleagues (Peck, in press), but there are far too many unknowns that demand answers. A brief list of important questions that need answers might include:

1) What forces of a political, economic, social, and reform nature operate to increase or decrease the expansion of integration?

2) When faced with system opposition, what change processes result in ultimate adoption of increased integration opportunities?

3) Once integration options have been adopted what factors sustain or terminate adoption?

4) What are the "local" accommodations that systems make to model programs in order to sell and maintain integration expansion?

Synchronizing Rhetoric and Practice. It is probably true that the match between words and deeds is quite poor when it comes to integration. There are many reasons for the disparity, including:

1) It is easy for individuals to speak in favor of integration on one hand and then do nothing in the face of predictable barriers.

2) Various regulatory mechanisms require service systems to certify that they practice some level of integration. However, this certification is in writing only, and seldom is there direct scrutiny of actions. Put simply, service systems receive dollars for saying, not doing, when it comes to integration.

3) As highlighted earlier in the discussion on parental involvement, sometimes the value of integration is in conflict with other values around service delivery (e.g., parental choice, delivery of maximally intensive services).

Some corrective actions to bring behavior more in line with rhetoric might include:

1) Dealing directly with the rationalization that integration is unrealistic or non-pragmatic. This first requires that we, as a profession, acknowledge publicly and often that integration is no easy, quick-fix option. The personnel, fiscal, and political barriers are real, they are not the lies perpetrated necessarily by those who advocate the status quo (Strain, 1990). Our rhetoric must acknowledge what it will take to operate quality integrated programs. Simply arguing for integration is not enough. A close analogy comes to mind. In his ballad about the Vietnam era and patriotism, writer John Prine says, "Your flag decal won't get you into heaven anymore." So it is for pro-integration rhetoric. Notice also that speaking directly to the barriers precludes the administrative back-stepping that is now cloaked in the language of the pragmatic and sensible.

2) The practice of tying funding to verbal testimony about integration practices is essentially a resource allocation issue. Until we can monitor practices directly, and directly reward programs for the consistency between saying and doing, we will perpetrate lots of saying and relatively little doing. Such monitoring must occur at all administrative

levels: federal, state, and local. The monitoring need not have a punitive intent, only a truth finding and differential rewarding one.

3) Finally, we as a profession must acknowledge and publicly discuss the potential value conflicts around integration that emerge with early intervention service delivery. Most of us desire for parents to be decision-makers. Some parents may decide for integration, others against and some integration options in some communities may offer fewer services than segregated options. What are the important decision-rules in this scenario, given that a quick fix is likely not possible for all integration options?

Prioritizing Children with Special Needs and Integration. If wide-spread integration is to occur in this country, the issue must not be addressed as an afterthought to the educational and social forces mentioned earlier.

School reform cannot be allowed to proceed without bringing children with special needs into the equation. Notably, Elmore's (1991) work in the area makes absolutely no mention of children with special needs or integration. Not only is integration effective for children with disabilities but it is important to publicize the fact that the intervention procedures developed in early intervention and special education can offer huge dividends to schools interested in improving home-school collaboration, school survival skills, and a host of developmental outcomes for children. The purposeful efforts to help translate and transfer these validated methods of instruction to regular education also will make these typical settings more responsive to the learning requirements of children with special needs.

In addition to school reform matters, we must also bring the concerns of children with special needs and integration to the world of unions and contract negotiations. While few of us may rush with glee to the challenge, we can no more

avoid this arena than as individuals we can avoid dentistry without suffering additional and more aversive consequences. As the prior materials have indicated, unions may not operate with any awareness of or intent concerning the integration needs of young children with disabilities. Unions fall outside many boundaries for regulation and monitoring; therefore, our major avenue of influence is educational. That education should focus, for example, on issues of: (a) potential public law-union conflicts; (b) integration as a valued outcome; (c) data on the effectiveness of integration at the early childhood level; (d) comments by supportive parents, teachers, and administrators; and (e) site visits to integrated programs.

Summary

The integration of young children with disabilities is a multidimensional, multifaceted enterprise. It simultaneously demands attention to issues of assessment and curriculum, teacher preparation, friendship formation and social skills, parental concerns, and the global, educational context in which this innovation has evolved. If ever there was a case to prove the old adage, "Complex problems require complex solutions", this is it.

The existence of wide-spread integration in this country will likely not be possible without a new, coordinated, and massive effort to understand and alter many of the fundamental features of educational practice and policy as they exist today. To assume that integration efforts will grow and blossom to their full potential without regard to issues of finance, unionization, site-based school management, educational reform, and parental concerns, is foolhardy.

References

Elmore, R.F. (1991). Restructuring schools. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Guskey, T.R. (1986). Staff development and the process of teacher change. Educational Researcher, 15, 5-12.

Johnson, S.M. (1984). Teacher unions in schools. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Kearns, D.T. & Doyle, D.P. (1988). Winning the brain race. San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press.

Peck, C. (in press). Qualitative analysis of mainstreaming practices. In C. Peck, S.L. Odom, & D. Bricker (Eds.), Integrating young children with disabilities into community programs. Baltimore: Brookes.

Strain, P.S. (1990). LRE for preschool children with handicaps: What we know, what we should be doing. Journal of Early Intervention, 14, 291-296.

APPENDIX A

Resources for Information on Early Childhood Policies and Programs

Council for Administrators in Special Education (CASE)
of the Council for Exceptional Children
615 16th Street, NW
Albuquerque, NM 87104
(505) 243-7622

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
of the Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
(703) 620-3660

National Head Start Resource Access Program
Administration for Children, Youth and Families
Office of Human Development Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, DC 20013
(202) 245-0562

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009-5786
(800) 424-2460

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320
King Street Station 1
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 519-3800

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC-TAS)
Suite 500
NCNB Plaza
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
(919) 962-2001

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs
Early Childhood Branch
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 732-1084